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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 2865  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2237  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1890  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5163  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2099  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5368  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8961  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0730  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6537  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1753  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2123  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0601  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2355  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4366  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000214

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2019  
TAGS: [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: BURMA: TCG REGAINS LIMITED VISA POWERS FOR UN,  
ASEAN

REF: RANGOON 175

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Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4  
(b and d).

¶1. (SBU) During the past month, UN and ASEAN members of the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) have joined us in urging the Burmese Government to reconsider its early March decision to strip the TCG of its power to approve visas for Cyclone Nargis-related activities (reftel). In an April 3 letter to the TCG, the Burmese Government partially reversed its decision, granting the TCG authority to handle visa requests for UN and ASEAN personnel involved in Nargis assistance programs. UN agencies and ASEAN were instructed to provide the GOB with the names of foreigners working on Nargis projects. The letter specifically prohibited the TCG from facilitating visas for INGOS; it did not address donor visas.

¶2. (C) During an April 6-7 TCG meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, UN Resident Coordinator Bishow Parajuli reiterated a request for the GOB to reinstate the TCG's power to facilitate visas for NGOs, INGOS, and donors involved in humanitarian relief. According to World Food Programme Country Director and TCG member Chris Kaye, GOB officials were adamant that INGOS and donors must work through their respective line Ministries and the Foreign Affairs Policy Committee (FAPC) for visas, noting that this was a return to pre-Nargis policy. Kaye observed that although TCG Chairman U Kyaw Thu recognizes the need to maintain the positive momentum of the TCG and understands the negative optics associated with the visa issue, the decision to strip the TCG of its visa authority was made by more

senior officials. Kaye views the GOB's April 3 decision as a "small improvement," and shares Kyaw Thu's hope that the GOB will again streamline the visa process once the FAPC becomes overburdened by Nargis visa requests.

¶3. (C) Thai Ambassador Bunnag, currently ASEAN's lead representative on the TCG, told us on April 7 that, in the Nay Pyi Taw meeting, he joined Parajuli in pressing for a GOB re-think of its visa policy reversal. Bunnag said he emphasized that the U.S. and European Chiefs of Mission had made clear to him their governments' serious concerns about the revised visa policy. Bunnag said the "slight" revision for the UN and ASEAN is of some use, but he is not yet optimistic for a revision to include others, like INGOS and Western donors.

Comment

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¶4. (C) While the revision for the UN and ASEAN is a small step in the right direction, the GOB still continues to tie the hands of the TCG, inhibiting its ability to facilitate assistance to the Delta. This may have far-reaching implications, as the UN continues to request substantial assistance under the Post-Nargis Recovery Plan (PONREPP) from donors who will now directly face increased bureaucratic impediments. Some UN officials hope the GOB will review the policy anew when the FAPC becomes overburdened with visa paperwork. Other observers speculate that the visa restrictions will stay, believing the motivation is likely a regime desire to limit the access of Western governments to the Delta in the lead-up to next year's election. Since the

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TCG limitations came into effect, the GOB has continued to issue Nargis-related visas, but with longer lead times. Requests for Bangkok-based Embassies and USAID/RDMA to attend a April 3 UN Donors Conference resulted in visas, but some, including those for USAID/RDMA officials, arrived too late to allow actual attendance at the meeting.

DINGER